

I. Introduction

Why Preserve? The Benefits of Historic Preservation

The benefits of preserving Montana's historic and prehistoric resources are deep and far reaching. It is indeed universally true that historic and prehistoric sites provide us with a way of understanding our roots and our sense of place. Historic places furnish historians and archaeologists invaluable research opportunities that compliment oral histories, documents, periodical literature and other archival and library materials. At the same time, they offer students of all ages tangible links to earlier generations of people over the entire range of human existence in this area. They bring to life events in our past and enhance our educational curriculums. They help us understand the fabric of our communities and how we can better plan for our cities and towns in the future. They offer special, meaningful places where we can honor and celebrate our culture - quietly and in more festive ways. They provide a special dimension and uniqueness to our streetscapes and landscapes and help to define who we are. Montana is often referred to as "The Last Best Place." Inherent in that monogram is the notion that we value our heritage and the *places* we call home. Heritage places, first and foremost, build an identity for us as Montanans and educate us to that identity.

In addition to their intrinsic educational and cultural value, historic sites also serve the community in traditional as well as new functional ways. While many old buildings readily continue to provide necessary spaces for commercial, residential, educational, social and industrial activities, others may be adapted as necessary to meet new community needs without destroyed fundamental historic fabric. Often, rehabilitating older buildings is more cost efficient than new construction, especially when the developer can take advantage of financial incentives available under state and federal programs and laws. Historic bridges and abandoned railroad corridors have found new life as recreational trails under the "Rails-to-Trails" program. The USDA Forest Service historic cabin rental program successfully meets both demands for public use and the need for dollars to repair and maintain these significant structures.

The preservation of historic sites also enhances economic development opportunities. Numerous studies have shown that historic preservation adds value to both local commercial and residential developments. Nowhere is this more certain than in our historic downtowns. Nationally, the National Trust for Historic Preservation's successful Main Street Program has generated 226,900 net new jobs, 56,300 net new businesses, and stimulated 88,700 building rehabilitation projects, bringing \$16.1 billion in new investment to economically distressed historic commercial downtown centers. Statewide tourism, which has been the single largest growth industry for Montana in recent years, has risen from some 4.5 million in the mid-eighties to 9.6 million non-resident visitors in 2001. This population alone accounted for 1.7 billion dollars in sales in 2001 (*Montana Tourism & Recreation Strategic Plan 2003-2007*). Importantly, history and culture are widely recognized as the number one tourist attraction with 65% of all U.S. travelers including heritage/cultural experiences on their vacations. Through historic preservation,

Montana, with its unique, interesting and authentic historical places, can expect to hold its competitive edge in this key economic development sector.

Historic preservation benefits Montana in many ways. It makes sense – culturally, educationally, functionally, and economically.

The Montana Historic Preservation Plan

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, calls for the granting of federal funds to States for the purpose of implementing the national policy and programs for historic preservation at the state level within the context of an appropriate statewide plan. More particularly, the Act calls upon each State Historic Preservation Office to "prepare and implement a comprehensive statewide historic preservation plan" and to "cooperate with the Secretary [of the Interior], the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and other Federal and State agencies, local governments, and organizations and individuals to ensure that historic properties are taken into consideration at all levels of planning and development." The Act also states that "No grant may be made under this Act unless the application is in accordance with the comprehensive statewide historic preservation plan which has been approved by the Secretary..." As such, the State Plan serves as an important tool to set priorities for the investment of human and financial resources in historic preservation. Specifically, it is designed "to be used by the State Historic Preservation Office and others throughout the State for guiding effective decision-making on a general level, for coordinating statewide preservation activities, and for communicating statewide preservation policy, goals, and values to the preservation constituency, decision-makers, and interested and affected parties across the State" (*National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund Grants Manual, Chapter 6, Section G*).

The planning cycle for Montana's previous State Plan, *Working Together: The Montana Historic Preservation Plan*, was 1997-2002, which means that it is now due for revision. The present plan, *Working Together to PRESERVE MONTANA: The Montana Historic Preservation Plan* will apply to the next five years, 2003-2007. Aside from its title, this plan also draws substantively upon its predecessor for guidance and content. This is in no way to say that the previous plan was unfulfilled, but rather to acknowledge that many of the assessments, issues, and strategies for historic preservation in Montana established five years ago remain equally valid today.

As stipulated in guidelines provided by the Department of the Interior, National Park Service, this revised Montana State Plan is a concise, summary document, containing the following sections:

- A summary of how the Plan was revised, including sources of information and ideas;
- A summary assessment of the full range of historic and cultural resources in Montana and the current state of knowledge about these resources;

- An outline and discussion of important issues which must be addressed in preserving these resources;
- A vision, articulated as goals and objectives, for historic preservation in Montana as a whole and for use as direction in the Montana State Historic Preservation Office;
- A statement of the Plan's time frame or planning cycle; and
- A bibliography of special studies and other supporting documents which were used in preparing the Plan and will assist in its implementation.

Additional supporting documentation is provided in two appendices. Further information may be obtained by contacting the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena.